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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LIBREVILLE 000421

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR A/C FOR LISA KORTE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#)

SUBJECT: GABON: OPPOSITION IN DISSARAY FOLLOWING THE  
ELECTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Eunice Reddick for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) The Gabonese opposition has been unable to present a meaningful challenge to the results of the August 30 election despite lingering questions about the legitimacy of the vote count. With 18 candidates on election day, the opposition's failure to coordinate split the vote, giving Ali Bongo Ondima and the ruling Democratic Party of Gabon (PDG) their victory.

The opposition remains fractured and disorganized in the aftermath of the election. Rudderless, the opposition is unable to capitalize on public dissatisfaction with the ruling party and Ali Bongo. The Gabonese opposition's future is bleak, which will likely fuel growing public disillusion with the political process as a means to improve the economy and address labor unrest. END SUMMARY.

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THE OPPOSITION: NOTHING DOING  
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¶2. (C) None of the presidential candidates could outline a coherent plan to effectively challenge to Ali Bongo Ondimba's likely inauguration as President. The Ambassador and emboffs met with candidates Pierre Mamboundou of the Gabonese People,s Union (UPG), Bruno Ben Moubamba (Independent) and Yvette Ngwevilo Rekangalt (Independent) in the wake of the election results. All protested the results, but none articulated ways in which they were mobilizing public support for their cause.

¶3. (C) When asked what his plans are for opposing the results of the election Mamboundou, the most senior and well-recognized member of the opposition in Gabon, held up his hands, shrugged and said "What can we do?" Mamboundou could only talk about the UPG's plans in vague generalities, complaining that this is the third election stolen from him by a member of the Bongo family. During the meeting Mamboundou was non-committal if the UPG would formally submit a challenge of the election results to the Constitutional Court. While he said such a challenge was "likely" he could not provide details. On September 17 the UPG submitted its challenge based on claims of fraud in 67 percent of polling centers, though UPG contacts told poloff they are not optimistic the challenge will succeed.

¶4. (C) Rekangalt and Moubamba, both minor candidates in the election, talked about general ideas to mobilize the public in opposition to Ali Bongo. When pressed for details or a timeline, neither could provide specifics. Rekangalt noted she would submit a challenge to the election results based on the question of Ali Bongo's heritage and the widespread rumor that he is not Gabonese by birth and, thus, ineligible for the presidency. Moubamba was skeptical about the role of the Constitutional Court and did not plan on submitting a formal challenge at all. Moubamba, who presented a number of cogent

arguments against PDG hegemony, left Gabon on September 13 for France and the U.S. where he will be the "international spokesperson" for the opposition, a move that has wiped away any positive feelings he garnered during his election bid and headline-making hunger strike.

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A DEAFENING SILENCE  
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15. (C) Neither Mamboundou, Andre Mba Obame (the independent candidate who also captured more than 25 percent of the vote), nor any other opposition candidate has made public appearances or enunciated a clear public message after the election. All three candidates told emboffs that they had no immediate plans for public appearances. They each attributed the opposition's silence to restrictions by the Gabonese Government on broadcast and print media and the pervasive presence of security forces throughout Libreville to dissuade public gatherings. Mamboundou and the opposition were noticeably silent in the chaotic days following the election when large groups of people took to the streets of Port Gentil to loot. That silence has continued, with many Gabonese now writing off the opposition as ineffectual or disinterested.

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WHO WILL STEP UP?  
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16. (C) At this point there is no likely successor to take up the mantle of the opposition. Mamboundou is aging and his

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health is failing. Andre Mba Obame, while popular in areas dominated by the Fang ethnicity, has not rallied the rest of the country to his cause. The 13 other independent candidates have no party structure or support beyond their immediate campaign team. Other minor opposition personalities are either seen by the Gabonese people as corrupt, secretly allied with the ruling party, ineffectual or a combination of all of the above. As a result, there is a growing leadership vacuum in the opposition. Unlike the ruling party, there is no clear inheritor.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) Mamboundou's inability to lead in the critical days following the announcement of the election results set a poor precedent for the rest of the disorganized opposition. Even the government vote count gave the opposition over 55 percent of the vote, an indication of the general unpopularity of Ali Bongo Ondimba and the ruling party. However, the opposition's fissures may only deepen further, rendering it incapable of capitalizing on Ali Bongo's weaknesses and representing the interests of the population. The opposition's continued ineffectiveness allows the PDG to retain its dominance without any significant pressure to improve governance, address labor unrest and expand the economy. UPG may hope that, at a minimum, the late challenge would force the Constitutional Court to keep the "clock" ticking for another month while it considers the challenge before Ali Bongo Ondimba could be inaugurated. Even if they believe their effort is futile, it could call into question Ali Bongo Ondimba's commitment to the rule of law if he short-circuits the process. END COMMENT.  
REDDICK